Introduction

Adequate natural and developed open space and recreational facilities are not merely desirable, but are essential to the overall well being of a community. A well-managed system that provides active and passive recreational opportunities is considered an indispensable community feature, one that should be available to all ages on a year-round basis in the city of Scottsdale. The need for this system has resulted from increased leisure time, higher incomes, greater mobility, and an increasing population. Open space in and around Scottsdale is being absorbed at a rapid rate. The growing need for public open space and recreational amenities are a key focus of the city. As a result of this philosophy, the city is aggressively pursuing opportunities to acquire new open space resources and looking into retrofitting existing parks and facilities to accommodate the recreational needs of the future. Currently, the city’s open space and park system includes approximately 15,000 acres of developed and undeveloped areas. Ultimately, the city will have 44,000 acres of open space when it is built out.
Special opportunities exist, or will be created, in Scottsdale that will provide these unique assets, such as:

- McDowell Sonoran Preserve
- Indian Bend Wash
- The Sonoran Desert
- Numerous washes, natural or improved (accommodating trails while maintaining the delicate balance with wildlife habitats)
- Scenic vistas and vista corridors, and scenic corridors (some that may also accommodate trails)
- Access to regional open space amenities
- Unique rocks and land forms
- Urban open space that includes regional canals and trails
- Public arts, festivals, art shows
- Active and desert parks
- Multi-use (pedestrian, bicycle, equestrian, etc.) trails (non-paved)
- Multi-use (pedestrian, bicycle, etc.) paths (paved)
- Rare, historic, archaeological and cultural resources

In 1978, the city of Scottsdale created a parks planning system that was based on the park/recreation facilities provided rather than a set number of acres. The system recommended three classes of parks to be provided: neighborhood parks, community parks, and specialty parks. Projected population bases are used to determine future park needs and locations. In Scottsdale, it has been the practice that land developers often participate in the provision of public parks where new population bases are created as a result of the development plan. In the future, provision of land for parks will be a key issue, as fewer large developments will likely take place.

This element establishes a set of integrated visions, values, goals, and implementation strategies that guide decision-making and lead toward the provision of a comprehensive open space system and recreational plan. Furthermore, this element represents an important step in the city’s continuing effort to enhance the public’s ability and opportunities to enjoy recreation in Scottsdale. These facilities and programs enhance the social, psychological and physical well being of the citizens by providing them with enjoyable activities and settings in which to spend their leisure time. The park and recreation system of developed open space provides opportunities for active recreation activities. The McDowell Sonoran Preserve provides opportunities for passive recreation activities. The Preserve is discussed more thoroughly in the Preservation and Environmental Planning Element, but is referenced here for its passive recreation opportunities. When active recreation - field sports, tennis, and basketball - activities are discussed in the Open Space and Recreation Element, it should be understood that these policies do not apply to the McDowell Sonoran Preserve.
The goals and strategies in this element are based on the following planning principles and basic findings of facts or existing conditions:

- A balanced and adequate system of open spaces is essential to this community. The city of Scottsdale is committed to maintaining and improving both active and passive open spaces in the community for the present and future generations.

- Schools contribute significantly to the open space assets of the community. Loss of school open space and facilities would be detrimental to the system and would substantially diminish recreational opportunities in Scottsdale.

- A well-balanced open space system provides more than recreation and leisure opportunities. Open space is a vital component of a balanced, attractive, and desired way of life. In some cases, open space helps residents of urban areas to maintain a connection with nature and their environment.

- Open space softens the visual image of the built environment, and generally provides for an aesthetically pleasing community.

- Increasing population and changing demographic characteristics will continue to impose increasing demands on open spaces and recreational amenities. Limited resources often hamper the provision of recreation programs and facilities.

- Open space offers the opportunity for the city to retain, manage, and interpret the southwestern history and heritage of the past.
• The character and function of open space will be different depending upon the context of the area within which it is located. Again, balance is the key. The city will work to balance the recreational needs of neighborhoods with the neighborhoods’ other quality of life considerations, like lighting and noise.
• Open space is often threatened by intense adjacent/surrounding uses, over use, and development encroachment.
• Viewsheds to open space and visual linkages are often in danger as the Valley continues to develop.
• The importance of saving the McDowell Sonoran Preserve is underscored by Arizona Game and Fish, which considers the McDowell Mountains the most significant wildlife habitat in the Valley outside the Tonto National Forest.

Scottsdale Values ...

• Strong community support for preservation of open space and citizens that are dedicated to preserving the city’s natural and man-made environment.
• Natural and man-made open space systems and the views of the surrounding landscape for their intrinsic value.
• The availability and development of a variety of high quality recreational opportunities. (such as libraries, golf, tennis, walking, biking, sight seeing, wildlife observation, hiking, equestrian activities, group sports, boating, fishing, skateboard parks, dog parks, pedestrian corridors, and greenways, etc.)
• Access to numerous open space areas including the Indian Bend Wash and the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, and neighborhood parks.
• Social interaction achieved through recreational services and facilities.
• Maximizing resources by using multi-use facilities, i.e., Indian Bend Wash, joint-use school sites, and Community Centers.
• The developing potential of existing open space resources represented by school grounds, flood control areas, and other open spaces.
• Regional cooperation that plans and preserves the region’s open space and recreational facilities.
• Utilizing the redevelopment process as a tool to create new open space.
• A comprehensive and connected system that links together existing multi-use trails with developing areas and the natural preserve areas.

• The history of planning the future expansion of recreational facilities, which has played a major role in the development of the existing system and continues to play an important role for future planning.

• Open space and recreational amenities that provide an individual solitude or participating in a group.

• Opportunities to provide recreational amenities that support current population as well as anticipate the desires and needs of future generations.

• A community with numerous recreational facilities dispersed throughout its borders. Such an inventory makes expansion and linking of these easier and more rewarding to the residents of the city.

• The recognition and support of the constitutionally-guaranteed private property rights and opposition to any practice or program that would result in a violation of those rights or the taking of property without due process and equitable resolution.

Goals and Approaches

1. Protect and improve the quality of Scottsdale’s natural and urban environments as defined in the quality and quantity of its open spaces.

• Provide ample opportunity for people to experience and enjoy the magnificent Sonoran Desert and mountains, balancing access with preservation.
• Provide a variety of opportunities for passive and active outdoor recreational activities, such as hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, rock climbing and wildlife observation.
• Provide opportunities for education and research on the Sonoran Desert and mountains, and the history and archaeology of the community.
• Provide access areas of sufficient size and with adequate facilities for public use and open space system access.
• Develop a non-paved public trail system for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding and link these trails with other city and regional trails.
• Restore habitat in degraded areas (burned, grazed, vehicular damage) of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve to its undisturbed condition including plant species diversity and natural ecological processes.

• Support tourism in the community by providing public scenic-outdoors-educational-recreational opportunities for visitors.

• Designate viewscreens and consider them when approving development.

• Promote creative residential and commercial development techniques consistent with the Character Plan for an area, to further preserve meaningful and accessible open space.

• Relate the character of open spaces to the uses and character of different areas of the city.

• Preserve and integrate visual and functional connections between major city open spaces into the design of development projects.

• Evaluate open space design with these primary determinants: aesthetics, public safety, maintenance needs, water consumption, drainage considerations, and multi-use and desert preservation.

• Integrate utilities and other public facilities sited in open spaces into the design of those open spaces, with consideration given to materials, form, and scale.

• Protect the visual quality of open space, unique city characteristics, and community landmarks.

• Preserve scenic views and vistas of mountains, natural features, and rural landmarks.

• Protect and use existing native plants, the design themes of character areas within which they are sited, and response to local conditions in landscape designs.

• Permanently secure an interconnected open space system to maintain visual and functional linkages between major city open spaces. This system should include significant Scottsdale landmarks, major drainage courses, regional linkages and utility corridors.

• Apply a Scenic Corridor designation along major streets to provide for open space and opportunities for trails and paths. This designation should be applied using the following guidelines:
  * There is a need for a landscaped buffer between streets and adjacent land uses.
  * An enhanced streetscape appearance is desired.
  * Views to mountains and natural or man-made features will be enhanced.

• Consider Buffered Roadways to provide the streetscape with a unique image that should also reduce the impacts of a major street on adjacent parcels. This type of designation is primarily an aesthetic buffer.

• Apply a Desert Scenic Roadway designation along the one mile and a half mile streets within the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Ordinance (ESLO) district that are not classified as scenic Corridors or Buffered Roadways to maintain and enhance open space along roadways in ESL areas.
• Apply up to a 100 foot scenic buffer along streets within and adjacent to the Recommended Study Boundary of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve on undeveloped (as of 10-04-2005) properties of 25 acres or larger.
• Promote project designs that are responsive to the natural environment, people’s needs, site conditions, and indigenous architectural approaches to provide unique character for the city.
• Continue to work with developers in designing land use plans that respect the topography, view corridors, wildlife corridors, and open space that exists. Where possible, enhance existing viewsheds as areas are developed and redeveloped.

2. Manage a comprehensive open space program that is responsive to public need, delivers high quality customer service, and exemplifies the city’s commitment to leadership in environmental affairs.

• Continue to encourage active citizen involvement in the development and management of open space.
• Provide a mechanism that receives and responds to public comments on the design, effectiveness and condition of sites and facilities.
• Provide a comprehensive program of consistent and effective operations and maintenance for all open space and facilities.
• Implement innovative policies and practices that support the city’s leadership in environmental affairs.
• Investigate and implement techniques that minimize use of chemicals in maintaining turf and landscape materials in developed open space areas.
• Maintain all public open space and recreational facilities, so they are safe and convenient for users.
• Maintain significant open space within the urban core of the city.
• Enhance the open space connections within Old Town.
• Create usable open spaces from existing street rights-of-way, widening sidewalks, realignment, developing trails, etc.
• Promote “docent” or “steward” programs for the city’s public open spaces. Build upon the existing programs for the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, adopt a street, and Friends of the Scenic Drive.
• Promote three distinctive types of open spaces through acquisition, dedication, or “set aside”:
  * Passive natural open spaces that will preserve wildlife habitat and view corridors and sensitive historical/archeological sites, and provide areas for low impact recreational activities, such as hiking, bicycling, mountain and rock climbing, and horseback riding.
  * A system of contiguous open spaces, accessible from Scottsdale neighborhoods, that connect the desert, mountains, washes, and canal system.
  * Park space and facilities for active recreational activities, such as softball, tennis, basketball, volleyball, swimming, and equestrian pursuits.
3. **Acquire and develop open space identified (by the City Council) as high priority through land dedication or purchase.**

- Encourage landowners with land suitable for future development to dedicate park space in advance at locations where there is an existing neighborhood park shortage or need to preserve open space, natural features or scenic views with the provision of credit toward future development.
- Provide incentives, where appropriate, to promote the dedication of natural area open space by property owners.
- Require the dedication of land by developers when the property to be developed is adjacent to an existing open space, park site or area otherwise identified as high priority for open space uses.
- Identify revenue sources and increase revenues, where possible, which can be allocated to open spaces and parks operating budgets and capital improvements.
- Encourage public acquisition of natural area or developed open space through direct purchase, purchase of development rights, or purchase of open space easements.

4. **Encourage and cooperate with other governmental agencies to preserve and protect regional open space and to acquire, develop, maintain and operate regional facilities that are available to people who live, work or visit the city of Scottsdale.**

- Support and encourage Maricopa County, the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG), State of Arizona, Tonto National Forest, and appropriate federal agencies and established private entities to acquire, develop, protect, maintain and operate existing and new open space in and around Scottsdale.
- Support other agencies in the development of regional pedestrian / bicycle/multi-use trails.
- Cooperate with other public and private agencies on the planning and development of open space sites and facilities located adjacent to city boundaries.

5. **Improve the quality of life for all Scottsdale residents by ensuring a wide range of recreational facilities and services.**

- Broaden citizen participation by the community in all phases of the planning and delivery of recreational open space.
- Encourage the expanded use of private resources and resources owned or controlled by public entities other than the city, which are suitable for recreational purposes.
• Conduct an ongoing, systematic assessment of recreational facility needs and preferences in recreational programming.
• Use parks and green space systems as primary elements in planning for long term sensitive growth planning, endangered species protection, and watershed protection by placing important natural areas in the public domain.
• Consider a wide range of recreational uses, including equestrian and bicycle uses during park planning.
• Pursue unique opportunities to acquire additional land having recreational possibilities at minimum costs.
• Prioritize new facilities based on those areas indicating the greatest need (i.e. overcrowding or unavailable resources).
• Encourage multiple use functions at recreational facilities - educational, recreational, etc.

6. Cooperate with and support the school districts that serve Scottsdale to be able to continue access to school sites and facilities for suitable, safe, and consistent recreational use and enjoyment.

• Continue close cooperation with the school districts for joint planning, design, development and use of open space and recreational facilities on or next to schools.
• Encourage the school districts to retain school sites used for community open space and recreational programs. When financially feasible, consider acquisition or joint use of sites and suitable facilities that are declared surplus if they are needed to maintain neighborhood open space accessibility.
• Where possible, locate parks and recreational spaces adjacent or contiguous to school grounds to encourage the maximum use of both properties. Supplemental recreational opportunities are available at most school sites. (see next bullet)
• Make school site recreation facilities (basketball courts, playgrounds, tennis courts, fields, etc.) available, wherever possible, and encourage joint use of park, school, and library sites by the city and School Districts.
• Promote school site design that encourages non-motorized travel for students and personnel by accommodating direct links between schools and neighborhoods in a manner that minimizes exposure to vehicles.
7. Provide attractive, well-maintained community recreational and park facilities that serve the entire community.

Scottsdale’s parks and recreational facilities are an important part of what makes the city a desirable place to live. The city is committed to continued investments in its infrastructure and public facilities, as resources are available. This commitment requires a strong emphasis on maintenance, rehabilitation, and modernization. The city is also committed to providing new services in areas that are under-served, and in areas where change is expected in the future. New parks and recreational amenities will help the city sustain its position as a model for public service delivery. The following policies, unless specifically noted, do not apply to the McDowell Sonoran Preserve.

- Where appropriate, maintain existing recreational facilities in public ownership to prevent potential shortages in the future.
- Design and construct new community facilities to have flexible functions to ensure adaptability to the changing needs of the community.
- Explore ways to expand the space available in the community for cultural interests.
- Develop improvement plans for the maintenance, restoration and enhancement of community recreational facilities, and keep these viable community assets by investing the necessary resources.
- Conduct comprehensive analyses of long-term infrastructure replacement requirements and costs through Capital Improvements Plan.
- Make infrastructure improvements on public open space only when these improvements are consistent with the goals of protecting and conserving the natural environment.
- Maintain and enhance existing park and recreational facilities.
- Seek opportunities to develop new parks and recreational facilities to meet the growing needs of residents and visitors of Scottsdale.
- Reflect the unique features and lifestyles of the surrounding neighborhoods in the character of parks and schools.
- Provide neighborhood parks that are easily accessible to local residents and provide basic recreational opportunities.
- Locate community parks where they are accessible from relatively long distances. Community parks concentrate a broad range of recreational activities for major portions of the city. Some community parks also include human service facilities.
- Provide unique recreational opportunities through specialty parks. These activities may range from riding the railroad at McCormick Railroad Park, to rock climbing and horseback riding, to simply enjoying the beauty of the natural desert.
- Locate parks to enhance unique landmarks and environmentally significant areas.
- Provide desert appreciation roadside areas or scenic view points, along scenic corridors.
• Provide trailhead facilities that provide parking and trail access for users where needed and appropriate.
• Develop parks, paths, and trails with the participation of private development through required fees, dedication of land, and construction of facilities.
• Provide tourist destination attractions of a recreational, historical, or archaeological nature.
• Parks should be located to enhance unique landmarks and environmentally significant areas.
• The method for determining basic park and school needs should be uniformly applied to all areas of the city. Character Plans may dictate the types of parks or facilities to be built.
• Optimize the use of existing parks and recreational facilities.
• Recognize that there are potential conflicts between providing recreational opportunities for citizens and professional sports teams.

8. **Provide access to educational, recreational, and cultural services for all residents.**

Accessibility refers to the location of facilities, their design, and the availability of transportation to reach them.
• Seek to provide new facilities in areas that currently lack them.
• Adapt existing facilities to ensure their accessibility to all persons.
• Strategically locate public facilities and parks to serve all neighborhoods in the city.
• Provide parks to allow for a variety of recreational opportunities to meet the needs of all areas of the community.
• Facilitate access to parks and community facilities by a variety of transportation modes including bicycle, pedestrian, and transit provisions to reduce reliance on the automobile. Ensure that there are bicycle and pedestrian links to recreational facilities and equestrian connections for riders to access open space riding areas.
• Facilitate access to educational, recreational, and cultural services by targeting programs for residents with special needs.
• Provide fully accessible public facilities to all residents and visitors.
• Ensure that all-major recreational facilities and programs are easily accessed by the area transit system.
There are many categories of parks proposed in this open space and recreation system including Neighborhood Parks, School/Parks, Community Parks, Specialty Parks, Desert Character Parks, and School Sites. The individual parks may vary from one type to another as their surroundings change. Multi-use trails are also an important part of the city’s open space and recreation system. In addition, the McDowell Sonoran Preserve provides opportunities for passive recreation areas. The city of Scottsdale Vision 2010 Parks Master Plan provides more detail about parks and recreation facilities for the city. Copies are available through the city’s Parks and Recreation Department. The Preservation Department can provide more information about the McDowell Sonoran Preserve.

The parks and trail component of the open space and recreation system are generally defined as:

**Neighborhoods Parks**

- **Purpose:** Provide primary recreation services and facilities that are easily accessible and available to local residents.
- **Park size:** 7-20 acres
- **Area served:** A single neighborhood or several neighborhoods, depending on the location of the park.
- **Location:** Preferably adjacent to elementary schools, neighborhood centers, or other gathering places. Near the center of the service area, with good pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular access.
- **Access:** Principally pedestrian and bike. When located next to schools, may have drive-in traffic due to availability of youth sport fields for leagues.

**Examples:** Pima Park, Paiute Park

**School/Parks**

- **Purpose:** Provide a range of recreational services and facilities to several neighborhoods that are served by an elementary or middle school. Shared amenities may include lighted facilities and lighted sports fields.
- **Park size:** 7-20 acres
- **Location:** Central to a group of neighborhoods and adjacent to a school facility. The School/Park should be within reasonable driving distance of all households in the service area.
- **Access:** Pedestrian, bike, and vehicular. Should have direct access from a collector level (or larger) street.

**Examples:** Sonoran Hills Park, Grayhawk Neighborhood Park
Community Parks
Purpose: Centralize a full range of recreational activities for major portions of the city with the capacity of accommodating large group reservations. Community parks generally feature a community center building designed to meet multi-generational recreation needs, and lighted recreational amenities and lighted sports fields.
Park size: 20-80 acres
Area served: Several neighborhoods or total city planning unit.
Location: Preferably central to a group of neighborhoods, where possible, adjacent to a Middle School or High School. Park should be within reasonable driving time of all households in the service area.
Access: Principally auto and bike. Should have direct access from a collector street (or larger) and not through a residential area.
Examples: Chaparral Park, Eldorado Park

Specialty Parks
Purpose: To provide specialized facilities and to preserve significant unique features of the community, including environmentally sensitive areas.
Park size: Variable
Area served: The entire city and beyond
Location: When necessary to capitalize on an existing facility or feature, or where a specialized activity can best be provided to serve interested persons.
Access: Variable – may require high degree of access, e.g. baseball stadium or may require controlled limited access, e.g. wildlife preserve.
Example: McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park

Desert Character Parks
With the October 1999, Scottsdale Desert Parks Design Guidelines, the city established criteria for the design and construction of parks that consider the unique qualities of desert areas and provide direction for expansion of the park system to serve the residents of these areas.
Design of desert parks emphasizes the unique Sonoran Desert environment through minimal site disturbance, desert-responsive architecture, and a sensitive approach to lighting. Toward this end, all parks should embody the character of the desert, reinforced through sensitive site planning, native landscape materials, appropriate architecture, and the preservation of significant natural areas within the park. All facilities are integrated into and are, in fact, part of the desert environment.
Selection of appropriate park sites and the development of suitable recreation activities are critical first steps in park development. When considering a potential park site, the following criteria should be evaluated:

1. Local Context
2. Topographic suitability
3. Proposed programs
4. Appropriate access

Neighborhood and Community Desert Parks should include playgrounds, ramadas, tennis, basketball and volleyball courts, soccer softball, and multi-use fields, and multi-use rooms. Pet amenities should also be a consideration. These facilities would be centrally located to the population base they are intended to serve. Lighting should be sensitively considered.

Specialty Desert Park facilities could be similar to what is planned for Pinnacle Peak. These may include trailhead parking areas, desert open space preserves, multi-use trails, interpretive trails, equestrian centers, mountain biking course, rest rooms, small classrooms for outdoor education, interpretive and museum-like center and demonstration gardens. These would be located to preserve public access to most sensitive or unique natural or cultural features in the area.

School Sites
Schools usually include recreational facilities that are programmed for youth and adult activities in the evenings and on weekends. Many school sites are associated with neighborhood or community parks.

Trails
The city’s goal is to develop and maintain a citywide interconnecting network of trails to provide valuable recreation and transportation opportunities for city residents and visitors. Trails can function as transportation and recreation links between schools, residential areas, parks, employment centers, shopping areas, and other areas of interest. Trails also provide hikers, walkers, joggers, equestrians, and mountain bikers opportunities to improve health and fitness, spend time with family and friends, enjoy the natural environment, and escape the stresses of everyday life. Where possible, trails will connect to neighborhoods or serve as destinations. Where practical, parks will be used as staging areas for trails into desert or mountain preservation areas. Trails are also addressed in the Open Space and Recreation Element and the Community Mobility Element.
Related Plans and Policies:

- Parks & Recreation 2018-2019 Strategic Plan
- Community Services Master Plan (2015)
- Desert Open Space System Plan (11/1997)
- Scottsdale Desert Park Design Guidelines (10/1999)
- Golf Course Policy (1997)
- Design Standards and Policies Manual
- Scottsdale Trails Master Plan (2004)
- Scenic Corridor Policy (2001)
- Transportation Master Plan (2016)
- MAG Regional Transportation Plan (2017)
- MAG Strategic Transportation Safety Plan (2015)
- Environmentally Sensitive Lands Ordinance

Reference:

- Community Centers and Libraries map (Public Services and Facilities Element)
- Schools and School Districts map (Public Services and Facilities Element)
- Preservation map (Preservation and Environmental Planning Element)
- Trails and Trailheads map (Preservation and Environmental Planning Element)
- McDowell Sonoran Preserve Access Areas Report

Element Graphics:

- Open Space Map
- Parks and Recreation Facilities map